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EARLY ATTACKS ON CHRISTIANITY AND ITS DEFENDERS.

SO long as Christianity was regarded by the Romans as a mere sect of Judaism, it shared the hatred and contempt, indeed, but also the legal protection bestowed on that religion. But as soon as Christianity claimed to be a new religion, claiming universal validity and acceptance, it was set down as unlawful and treasonable, a *religio illicita*, whose adherents have no right to exist, or as Tertullian puts it, "*non licet vos esse.*" The Christians were then made responsible for everything. The wildest tales were believed. The Christians were charged with preaching in their assemblies all acts of abominations, even incest and cannibalism; priests, jugglers, artificers, merchants and others kindled the fanaticism and indignation of the mob against the new religion because it interfered with their mercenary practices.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Christians in the Roman Empire in the first two centuries. It may perhaps be a rhetorical exaggeration when Justin writes in the middle of the second century: "There is not one single race of men, whether barbarians or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads or vagrants, or herdsmen living in tents, among whom prayers and giving of thanks are not offered through the name of the crucified Jesus";¹ or when Tertullian writes at the end of the century: "We

¹ Dialogue with Trypho, ch. CXVII.

are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you,—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, senate, forum,—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods.”² But there can be no doubt that the number of Christians must have been large enough to attract attention; they were even found in old Roman families.

By the edict of Claudius (41-54) in the year 53, the Jews were banished from Rome. As the Christians were confounded with the Jews, they too were included in this edict. Suetonius tells us³ that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were constantly raising tumults *impulsore Chresto*, “under the instigation of Chrestos.” It is very probable that in this *impulsor Chrestus*⁴ is preserved a dim reminiscence of the fact that Christianity, then finding an entrance into Rome and dividing the Jewish population of Rome into two parties as was often the case in other places, gave an impulse to those disturbances which determined the emperor to issue his edict. Here, however, Christianity still appears quite under the umbraculum of the Jewish religion, as a *religio licita*, a protection which of course could only extend as far for the Christians as it was granted to the Jews.

In the reign of Nero (54-68) the Christians are for the first time introduced into history in a manner worthy of them. When, as Tacitus tells us, the great conflagration under Nero⁵ had destroyed the greatest part of the city of Rome, and popular report pointed persistently to Nero as the incendiary, he sought to meet these rumors by casting the blame upon others, and inflicting the most extreme

² Apology, ch. XXXVII.

³ *Vita Claudii*, ch. XXV. Among those expelled by the edict of Claudius were Aquila and Priscilla, the friends of Paul.

⁴ The heathens used to say Chrestus instead of Christus (Tertullian, *Apol.* ch. III).

⁵ *Annales*, XV, 44.

punishments on those whom the people called Christians,⁶ and hated on account of their "infamous acts." In derision they were sewed up in the skins of wild beasts, torn to pieces by dogs, nailed to the cross, or being dressed in clothes that were prepared with inflammable material, were doomed to death by fire, to serve as an illumination at night.⁷ They were held convicted, as Tacitus says, not so much because the charge laid against them of being the authors of the conflagration had proved to be well founded, as on account of their general hatred of the human race.⁸ And their *odium humani generis* was a disposition so hostile to all other men that those who had dealings with them were justified in disregarding all those observances by which men are generally bound in dealing with each other. "They are thus marked off," Baur remarks, "as a class of men who had only to thank themselves and their entire want of all humane culture and disposition, if all considerations of humanity were put out of court in dealing with them.

This, then, was the view taken of the Christians by the Roman public of that age, and hence the *subdere reos* (i. e., those falsely charged with the guilt) that we read of was tolerated; the matter was considered to be perfectly regular. Even Tacitus takes this view of the transactions; he says not a word to indicate disapproval of these atrocities: on the contrary, the expressions he uses in reference to Christianity show clearly enough that he considered the procedure against them to be sufficiently justified."

Tertullian (who died about 220) thus alludes to the Neronian persecution: "This name of ours took its rise

⁶ "*Quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Christianos adpellabat.*"

⁷ Juvenal (*Sat.* I, 155 f.) who probably was an eye witness, describes how,
"At the stake they shine,
Who stand with throat transfixed and smoke and burn."

⁸ "*Haud perinde in crimine incendii, quam odio humani generis convicti sunt.*"

in the reign of Augustus; under Tiberius it was taught with all clearness and publicity; under Nero it was ruthlessly condemned (*sub Nerone damnatio invaluit*), and you may weigh its worth and character even from the person of its persecutor. If that prince was a pious man, then the Christians are impious; if he was just, if he was pure, then the Christians are unjust and impure; if he was not a public enemy, we are enemies of our country: what sort of men we are, our persecutor himself shows, since he of course punished what produced hostility to himself. Now, although every other institution which existed under Nero has been destroyed, yet this of ours has firmly remained—righteous, it would seem, as being unlike the author [of its persecution].”⁹

“This was the first of the persecutions, the fiery portal as it were, through which the Christians entered the arena in which they were now called to strive, to bleed, to die for their faith during two and a half centuries. This first persecution was no carefully planned attempt to suppress Christianity, founded upon civil or religious policy, but only a cruel outburst of hatred, which Nero turned to account in his own interest. Heathenism had not as yet learned to understand Christianity at all. It appeared to the heathen as something entirely strange, utterly opposed to every existing and traditional belief, and the Christians were regarded as men who, since they hated everything human, deserved nothing but hatred in return. Therefore, in dealing with them anything was permissible, and all considerations of humanity might be set aside. Now Christians might learn what awaited them. Heathenism had openly declared by action that Christianity was not to be tolerated, that it was to be annihilated as inhuman, hostile to the human race. Now, too, might the heathen know what they had to expect from the Christians. In

⁹ *Ad Nationes*, I, 7.

patient silence they endured all. The heroic age of the Christian church had begun, a heroism not of action, but of a suffering mightier than all deeds" (Uhlhorn).

Nero's successors, Galba, Otho, and Vitellius, followed one another in rapid succession. The latter was taken out of a dog's kennel in Rome while drunk, dragged through the streets, and shamefully put to death. Vespasian, in the year 69, was universally proclaimed emperor, and restored order and prosperity.

His son, Titus, who ten years after became emperor and highly distinguished himself by his mildness and philanthropy,¹⁰ then undertook the prosecution of the Jewish war, and becoming the instrument in the hand of God, destroyed the holy city and the temple. The Christians of Jerusalem, remembering the Lord's admonition, forsook the doomed city in good time and fled to the town of Pella, where King Herod Agrippa II, before whom Paul once stood, opened to them a safe asylum. The destruction of Jerusalem was the greatest calamity of Judaism, but a great benefit to Christianity. The rupture between synagogue and church was now also outwardly consummated by the thunderbolt of divine omnipotence. Henceforth the heathen could no longer look upon Christianity as a mere sect of Judaism, but must regard and treat it as a new, peculiar religion.

Under the suspicious and tyrannical Domitian (81-96), accustomed to call himself and to be called "Lord and God,"¹¹ Christianity was again made the object of direct attack. The charge now brought against the Christians was that of atheism; an inference from their refusal to pay honor to the gods of Rome. Under this accusation Flavius Clemens, the emperor's uncle, is said to have suf-

¹⁰ The people called him *Amor et Deliciae generis humani*.

¹¹ Suetonius, *Domit.* 13, says: "With equal arrogance, when he dictated the form of a letter to be used by his procurators, he began it thus: 'Our Lord and God commands so and so.'"

ferred martyrdom, while Domitilla, the wife of Clemens, was banished on a similar charge to the island of Pandateria, near Naples.¹² Eusebius¹³ also relates that Domitian, apprehensive of the appearance of a "Son of David" as a rival claimant to the throne, caused rigorous inquiries to be made in Palestine, which led to the apprehension of the grandsons of Jude the Lord's brother (Mark vi. 3). The simplicity, however, of their garb and demeanor, and the marks of labor on their horny hands, convinced the tyrant that he had nothing to fear from them, and he accordingly dismissed them with contempt. Domitian is also said to have banished the apostle John to Patmos, where he beheld the visions of the Apocalypse.¹⁴

Domitian's successor, the humane and justice-loving Nerva (96-98), recalled the banished, and refused to treat the confession of Christianity as a political crime, though he did not recognize the new religion as a *religio licita*.

Under his successor Trajan (98-117), Christianity was forbidden. Of famous martyrs we mention Symeon, bishop of Jerusalem, who, like his predecessor James,¹⁵ a kinsman of Jesus, was accused by fanatical Jews, and crucified A. D. 107, at the age of a hundred and twenty years.¹⁶ In the same year (or according to others in 115), the distinguished bishop Ignatius of Antioch was condemned to death, transported to Rome, and thrown before wild beasts in the Colosseum. Trajan, wholly ignorant of the nature of Christianity, was the first formally to pronounce it a proscribed religion, as it had been all along in fact. He revised the rigid

¹² Dion Cassius (in the abridgment of Xiphilinus) *Hist. Rom.* 67, 14, in Preuschen, *Analecta*, p. 131.

¹³ *Hist. Eccles.*, III, 19, 20.

¹⁴ Some think that John was banished under Nero. The Syriac version of the Apocalypse refers the banishment of John to the days of Nero.

¹⁵ His martyrdom is described by Hegesippus in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* II, 23; see also Josephus, *Ant.* XX, 9, 1.

¹⁶ Eusebius, *loc. cit.*, III, 32.

laws against all secret societies or prohibited clubs,¹⁷ and these laws were so framed as to include the Christian community in their operation. The celebrated correspondence¹⁸ between the Emperor and Pliny the younger, who was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor between 109-111, must be inserted here, both as throwing light upon the Roman policy, and as affording an instructive picture of the early churches.

Pliny to Trajan.

"It is with me, sir, an established custom to refer to you all matters on which I am in doubt. For who is better able either to direct my scruples or to instruct my ignorance?

"I have never been present at trials of Christians, and consequently do not know for what reasons, or how far, punishment is usually inflicted or inquiry made in their case. Nor have my hesitations been slight as to whether any distinction of age should be made, or persons however tender in years should be viewed as differing in no respect from the full-grown; whether pardon should be accorded for repentance, or he who has once been a Christian should gain nothing by having ceased to be one; whether the very profession itself, if unattended by crime, or else the crimes necessarily attaching to the profession, should be made subject of punishment.

"Meanwhile, in the case of those who have been brought before me in the character of Christians, my course has been as follows: I put it to themselves whether they were or were not Christians. To such as professed that they were, I put the inquiry a second and a third time, threatening them with the supreme penalty. Those who persisted I ordered to execution. For, indeed, I could not doubt, whatever might be the nature of that which they professed, that their pertinacity, at any rate, and inflexible obstinacy, ought to be punished. There were others afflicted with like madness, with regard to whom, as they were Roman citizens, I made a memorandum that they were to be sent for judgment to Rome. Soon, the

¹⁷ The Roman sodalities or colleges were festive clubs or lodges. But on account of the political and revolutionary ends which they pursued, Julius Cæsar had already dissolved them (Suetonius, *Div. Julius*, 42). The same was done by Augustus (Suetonius, *Div. Aug.*, 32). Compare Mommsen, *De collegiis et sodaliciis Romanorum*, Kiel, 1843.

¹⁸ For the text and literature, see Preuschen, pp. 14 ff.

very handling of this matter causing, as often happens, the area of the charge to spread, many fresh examples occurred. An anonymous paper was put forth, containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they either were or had been Christians, upon their calling on the gods after me, and upon their offering wine and incense before your statue, which for this purpose I had ordered to be introduced in company with the images of the gods, moreover, upon their reviling Christ—none of which things it is said can such as are really and truly Christians be compelled to do—these I deemed it proper to dismiss. Others named by the informer admitted that they were Christians, and then shortly afterwards denied it, adding that they had been Christians, but had ceased to be so, some three years, some many years, more than one of them as much as twenty years, before. All these, too, not only honored your image and the effigies of the gods, but also reviled Christ. They affirmed, however, that this had been the sum, whether of their crime or their delusion: They had been in the habit of meeting together on a stated day before sunrise, and of offering in turns a form of invocation to Christ, as to a god; also of binding themselves by an oath, not for any guilty purpose, but not to commit thefts, or robberies, or adulteries, not to break their word, not to repudiate deposits when called upon; these ceremonies having been gone through, they had been in the habit of separating, and again meeting together for the purpose of taking food—food, that is, of an ordinary and innocent kind. They had, however, ceased from doing even this after my edict, in which, following your orders, I had forbidden the existence of fraternities. This made me think it all the more necessary to inquire, even by torture, of two maid servants, who were styled deaconesses, what the truth was. I could discover nothing else than a vicious and extravagant superstition, and so, having postponed the inquiry, I have had recourse to your counsels. Indeed, the matter seemed to me a proper one for consultation, chiefly on account of the number of persons imperilled. For many of all ages and all ranks, aye, and of both sexes, are being called, and will be called, into danger. Nor are cities only permeated by the contagion of this superstition, but villages and country parts as well; yet it seems possible to stop it and cure it. It is in truth sufficiently evident that the temples, which were almost entirely deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the customary religious rites which had long been interrupted are being resumed, and that there is a sale for the food of sacrificial beasts, for which hitherto very few buyers indeed

could be found. From all this it is easy to form an opinion as to the great number of persons who may be reclaimed, if only room be granted for penitence."

The reply of the Emperor was as follows:

Trajan to Pliny.

"You have followed the right mode of procedure, my dear Secundus, in investigating the cases of those who had been brought before you as Christians. For, indeed, it is not possible to establish any universal rule, possessing as it were a fixed form. These people should not be searched for; if they are informed against and convicted they should be punished; yet, so that he who shall deny being a Christian, and shall make this plain in action, that is, by worshipping our gods, even though suspected on account of his past conduct, shall obtain pardon by his penitence. Anonymous information, however, ought not to be allowed a standing in any kind of charge; a course which would not only form the worst of precedents, but which is not in accordance with the spirit of our time."¹⁹

In fact the edict of Trajan marks an epoch in history, because it formally and absolutely denies to Christianity for the first time a legitimate existence in the Roman state. The Christians could remain in peace so long as no accuser came forward. No wonder therefore that Tertullian exclaimed: "What a self-contradictory sentence! He forbids their being sought out, as if they were innocent, and commands that they be punished as if they were guilty."²⁰

The rescript of Trajan continued under the following emperors to be the legal rule for the treatment of the Christians. To be a Christian was clearly designated as a crime that must be suppressed. As the number of the Christians increased the hatred of the heathen population towards them rose also, and it happened more and more frequently that Christians were accused and executed for no reason but the Christian name. There was no possible relief against so unrighteous a procedure, until the time should

¹⁹ Pliny, *Epist.*, X, 97, 98. See Neumann, *Der römische Staat*, pp. 18-26.

²⁰ *Apol.*, II.

come when the whole view taken of Christianity in the Roman empire would undergo an essential change.

As at this time the Christians had among them men of sufficient culture and learning to plead the cause of Christianity, an effort was made in that direction in the period immediately after Trajan's edict. Defensive writings known as "apologies" were addressed to the emperors, the governors of the provinces, and to the great public in general. Whatever effect they may have had otherwise, they certainly had no effect upon those whom they were intended to influence.

Trajan's successor, Hadrian (117-138), was indifferent to Christianity because of his ignorance of it.²¹ It is true that he directed the Asiatic proconsul Minucius Fundanus to check the popular fury against the Christians, and to punish only those who should be, by an orderly judicial process, convicted of transgression of the laws, while at the same time he ordered that "obstinacy" on the part of the Christians, i. e., a firm adherence to their profession, should be punished. Hadrian's rescript as preserved by Justin and Eusebius²² reads thus:

"Hadrian to Minucius Fundanus.

"I have received a letter written to me by the illustrious Serenius Granianus, whom you have succeeded. I desire the matter not to be passed over without being examined into, so that these men may not be harassed nor opportunity of malicious proceedings be offered to informers. If, therefore, the people of the province can clearly and legally bring their charges against Christians so as to answer before the tribunal, let them take this course only, and not proceed by importunate demands and mere outcries. For it is better, if any bring an accusation and prove anything to have been done contrary to the laws, to determine them according to the nature of the crime ;

²¹ How little this emperor knew of Christianity is evident from a remark of his in a letter to his brother-in-law Servianus, that "worshippers of Serapis are Christians, and these are devoted to Serapis, who call themselves Christ's bishops." For the text of this letter see Preuschen, *loc. cit.*, p. 19.

²² *Apol.*, I, 69; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, IV, 9.

but if the charge be only calumny, take care to punish the author of it as it deserves."²³

Conscientious governors, says Uhlhorn, acted henceforth on this rescript. And yet Antoninus Pius had to issue new rescripts of like tenor. There arose in Greece a severe persecution in which Publius, the bishop of Athens, lost his life.²⁴ The Emperor sent rescripts to Larissa and to Thessalonica, in which he forbade the introduction of new measures in the treatment of the Christians, and ordered that the limits prescribed by Trajan's edict should be strictly observed. And in all probability this was generally done in the time of Antoninus Pius. But we will not anticipate.

In the reign of Hadrian, the Jews, led by the pseudo-Messiah Bar-Cochab, persecuted all the Christians who would not join them in the insurrection. The outcome of this rebellion need not be narrated. Unable to persecute any further, the Jews circulated horrible calumnies on Jesus and his followers. "You," says Justin,²⁵ addressing the Jews, "have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy has sprung from one Jesus, a Galilean deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb,²⁶ where he was laid when unfastened from the cross,

²³ The genuineness of this rescript has been doubted by different scholars who considered it to be a Christian fiction. Uhlhorn considers it genuine. Keim, *Rom und das Christentum*, pp. 552 f., thinks that this rescript was composed by a Christian of Asia Minor, between 140-150 A. D. Baur also looks upon it as a Christian invention.

²⁴ Eusebius, *loc. cit.*, IV, 23.

²⁵ Dialogue with Trypho, ch. 108, 133.

²⁶ Here we have the origin of what has been called the "theory of fraud" of the resurrection of Jesus. It was invented by the Jewish priests who crucified the Lord, and knew it to be false (Matt. xxvii. 62-66, xxviii. 12-15). The lie was repeated and believed, like many other lies, by credulous infidels, first by malignant Jews at the time of Justin Martyr, then by Celsus, who learned it from them, but wavered between it and the vision-theory, and it was renewed in the eighteenth century by Reimarus in the *Wolfenbützel* Fragments. Strauss formerly defended the vision-theory, but at the close of his life, when he exchanged his idealism and pantheism for materialism and atheism, he seems to have relapsed into this disgraceful theory of fraud; for in his *Old*

and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven. Moreover, you accuse him of having taught those godless, lawless, and unholy doctrines which you mention to the condemnation of those who confess him to be the Christ, and a teacher from, and Son of, God."

In the reign of Hadrian the long succession of "apologies" took its rise, indicating a very bitter public sentiment against the Christians, and a critical condition of the church. The writers of these "apologies" known as "apologists" had not only to refute the charges and slanders of Jews and Gentiles, but they also endeavored to vindicate the truths of the Gospel, and attacked the vices and errors of idolatry.²⁷

The reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161) was for the most part a time of peace and toleration. The only recorded martyrdom under his rule, in the very year of his accession, is that of Telephorus, bishop of Rome.²⁸ Otherwise the church was protected by the emperor.²⁹ About the tenth year of his reign Justin Martyr laid before Antoninus Pius his First Apology "in behalf of those of all nations who are now unjustly hated and wantonly abused; I myself," he adds, "being one of them." In reply to this treatise of Justin, a rescript is said to have been issued by the emperor to the Assembly of Asia* to the effect that "the Christians should not be molested unless they made attempts against the government."³⁰ But the gravest doubts and New Faith (1873) he was not ashamed to call the resurrection of Christ "a world-historical humbug."

²⁷ See the next section.

²⁸ According to Uhlhorn he was martyred A. D. 135 or 137.

²⁹ According to Baur "the Christians suffered harsher oppressions than under Hadrian.

* *κοινὸν τῆς Ἀσίας.*

³⁰ Eusebius, IV, 13; Justin, *Apol.*, I, 70. In Eusebius it is an edict of Marcus Aurelius, although Eusebius says immediately before, chap. 12, that it was the emperor to whom Justin addressed his Apology, i. e., Antoninus Pius. Moreover, what Eusebius says at the end of chap. 13 of the confirmatory

have been raised respecting the authenticity of this document which we here give for the benefit of the student:

"I was of the opinion that the gods would take care that such people [the Christians] should not remain hidden, for they would punish much more, if they could, those who will not worship them. You torment them and accuse them as if they were atheists in their way of thinking, and you reproach them with other things which we cannot prove. It can only be advantageous to them if they are seen to die for that which is laid to their charge; when they prefer giving up their bodies to doing what you require of them, they conquer us. It is unkind to remind you of the earthquakes which have happened and still happen. Compared with the Christians you lose your courage in such circumstances; they have far more confidence in God than you. At such a time you appear to know nothing of the gods, you neglect the sacrifices, you do not know how to worship God, and therefore you are envious of those who worship him, and persecute them to death. Concerning these people some governors of provinces wrote to my divine father, and he replied to them that they should leave these people in peace if they do not attempt anything against the dominion of the Romans. And many have sent reports about them to me, and I also have answered in accordance with my father's opinion. If any one has a complaint to bring against any of these people as such [as a Christian] the accused person is to be discharged even if it is shown that he is what is said, but the accuser is to be punished."²¹

"Every word of this," says Baur," betrays the Christian writer, who makes the emperor give the heathens a lecture, while, with regard to the Christians, he speaks in exact accordance with the wishes of the Christians as to the way in which they would desire to be judged and dealt with by the Roman authorities. The emperor ends, in

testimony of the bishop Melito of Sardis cannot refer to this edict as an edict of Marcus Aurelius; for had Melito known of such a document he could not have omitted to mention it in his *Apology*; cf. Euseb. IV, 26. This accordingly can only refer to the missives to Larissa, etc. The alleged edict arose, no doubt, under Marcus Aurelius, but was imputed to Antoninus Pius, in order to increase its influence by giving it the authority of the earlier emperor (Baur).

²¹ Scholars like Neander, Baur, Uhlhorn, Schaff reject this edict as spurious, though it is defended by Wieseler.

fact, with issuing commands exactly contrary to those of the edict of Trajan."

Marcus Aurelius (161-180), the philosophic moralist, the patron of the stoics, the pupil of Fronto of Cirta, an opponent of the Christians, on whom he charged incestuous banquets,³² had no sympathy with Christianity, and probably regarded it as an absurd and fanatical superstition. His religion was a fatalistic pantheism. Nature was his God. "Everything harmonizes with me, which is harmonious to thee, O Universe! Nothing for me is too early or too late, which is in due time for thee. Everything is fruit to me which thy seasons bring, O Nature! From thee are all things, in thee are all things, to thee all things return." In proud resignation to the decisions of fate he sought his peace. "Willingly give thyself up to Clotho, allowing her to spin thy thread into whatever things she pleases." Marcus Aurelius believed that he could realize his moral ideal by his own power. He believed in himself and indeed in himself alone. "It is sufficient to attend to the *daimon* within, and to reverence him sincerely." A man who took this attitude could only reject the story of the cross, the gospel of grace for sinners. Marcus Aurelius,³³ says Uhlhorn, "was far too much of a slave to his philosophic theories, far too thoroughly steeped in the prejudices of the schools, to be able to give a hearing to the artless message of salvation. He was far too proud and cold to receive from the Christians' joy in their faith, any other impression than that of fanaticism. In his "Meditations"³⁴ he alludes only once to the Christians and this with scorn, tracing their whole enthusiasm for martyrdom to "sheer obstinacy" and love for theatrical display. "The soul,"

³² He is referred to by Minucius Felix in the *Octavius*, ch. IX and XXXI.

³³ On Marcus Aurelius see Farrar, *Seekers After God*, pp. 235 ff.; Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, II, p. 325 ff.

³⁴ English translation by Geo. Long, revised ed., London, 1880.

he says, "when it must depart from the body, should be ready to be extinguished, to be dispersed, or to subsist a while longer with the body. But this readiness must proceed from its own judgment, and not from mere obstinacy, as with the Christians; it must be arrived at with reflection and dignity, so that you could even convince another without declamation."⁸⁵ How far above the Christian martyrs, this emperor evidently thought himself! Of what led them to death, he had no conception. He can hardly have known more of Christianity than what was conveyed to him by hearsay, and what Fronto, his teacher and friend, may have told him of it.

It is significant for the position of Marcus Aurelius, that Fronto, the rhetorician, the author of the first controversial work directed against Christianity of which we have any knowledge,⁸⁶ was so intimate with him. During the first years of the reign of Marcus Aurelius the Christians' position remained the same as before. Trajan's regulations were still the standard for all proceedings against them, except that the many calamities which had come upon the Empire had excited the fanaticism of the heathen to greater fierceness, and the authorities offered less resistance to the demands of the people. A persecution flamed up with peculiar fury in Asia Minor, and in it Polycarp, the venerable bishop of Smyrna, suffered martyrdom. When asked to swear by the genius of the emperor, Polycarp answered: "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has never done me a wrong. How can I blaspheme him, my King, who has saved me?" And having prayed: "Lord God Almighty, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I praise Thee that Thou hast judged me worthy of this day and of this hour, to participate in the number of Thy wit-

⁸⁵ *Meditations*, XI, 3.

⁸⁶ It was soon cast into the shade by the treatise of Celsus.

nesses and in the cup of Thy Christ," he was consumed by the flames. This took place April 6 A. D. 166.⁸⁷

Another prominent martyr of this time was Justin Martyr. When he wrote his second Apology, he was already aware of what awaited him. He narrates the executions of several Christians, which had given the occasion for the Apology, and then adds: "I too expect to be taken in their snares and impaled." He knew, says Uhlhorn, that the philosopher Crescens longed to be revenged upon him and had daily before his eyes proofs of how easy it was to procure the death of a Christian. Crescens denounced him, and with several other Christians he was brought before Junius Rusticus, the prefect of the city. Justin quietly explained who he was, and what was his occupation, that he had himself sought and found the truth, and that now when any one came to him he communicated to him the teachings of the truth. "Art thou not then a Christian?" asked the prefect, and Justin replied: "Yes; I am a Christian." Together with others, Justin was beheaded with the axe.

But worse things were yet to come. The emperor had issued a rescript which went far beyond the regulations of Trajan. Melito of Sardis calls it barbarously cruel. "What has never before happened," writes Melito, "the race of the pious is now persecuted in Asia by new edicts. The shameless informers, greedy of the property of others, plunder, as they find in the edicts the occasion to do so, the innocent by day and night." Melito doubts whether a righteous emperor could ever ordain anything so unjust, but says that if this decree and this new edict, which should not have been passed as it is even against hostile barbarians, does proceed from the emperor himself, they entreat him the more earnestly not to give them up to be thus pub-

⁸⁷ There is a difference of opinion among scholars as to the date of Polycarp's martyrdom. Schaff, Renan, Ewald, Lipsius, Zalm, Harnack and others assign it to the reign of Antoninus Pius in 155. Wieseler, Keim, Uhlhorn and others favor the old date (166-167), which rests on the authority of Eusebius and Jerome.

licly plundered.³⁸ This is just the period of the first great Christian persecutions which were conducted by the Roman state authorities. The first fell upon the church at Smyrna in the year 167, the second ten years afterwards upon the Gallic churches at Lugdunum and Vienna. The most distinguished victim of this Gallic persecution was Pothinus, the bishop of Lyons, a man over ninety years old.³⁹

The persecution extended throughout the entire empire, an early prelude of the subsequent general persecutions. "The demon [of the Christians]," Celsus exultingly asserts, "is not only reviled, but banished from every land and sea, and those who, like images, are consecrated to him are bound and led to punishment and impaled (or crucified), whilst the demon—or, as you call him, the Son of God—takes no vengeance on the evil doer." Celsus saw in this the fulfilment of the saying of Apollo's priest: "The mills of the gods grind slowly," and he scornfully points to the fate of the worshipers of the one God. "They [the Jews] instead of being masters of the whole world, are left with not so much as a patch of ground or a hearth; and of you [the Christians] one or two may be wandering in secret, but they are being sought out to be punished with death."⁴⁰ But in all his exultation at the destruction of the Christians, Celsus must still have felt that this persecution had not exterminated them, and would not do so. Otherwise why did he choose just this time to make a written attack on them? For, in all probability, the famous, or rather infamous, treatise which he published under the title "A True Discourse," belongs to this very time.

THE APOLOGISTS.

From the beginning Christianity bore within itself the consciousness of possessing a power which should over-

³⁸ Eusebius, IV, 26.

³⁹ For the narrative of this fiery trial see Eusebius, V, 1, 2.

⁴⁰ Origen against Celsus, VIII, 39, 40, 69.

come the world. The words of Jesus, "Ye are the salt of the earth," "ye are the light of the world," were the guiding thought by which the Christians were inspired from the beginning, and which made them conscious that they were the soul of the world, and that they alone had a future to look forward to. Where there are men who in this way feel themselves to be the soul of the world, the time is indisputably approaching when the reins of the government of the world will fall unasked into their hands.

But before things had advanced so far, much repugnance, detestation, hatred and enmity against Christianity had to be overcome. But still it was successful, though all that it had to oppose to the whole might of heathenism, was simply the word, the testimony of Christ. To this must be added the life, love and suffering of the early Christians, which made an impression upon the heathen, and thus many a soul among them thirsting for truth, many a seeker after wisdom in the schools of the philosophers, in the temples of gods the most diverse, or in Jewish houses of prayer, found here the deepest longing satisfied. The time had come when not only—to use the words of Celsus—"wool-workers, cobblers, leather-dressers, the most illiterate and vulgar of mankind, were zealous preachers of the gospels," but also the cultured and learned, and from the ranks of the latter came those men who wrote treatises or apologies in defence of the new religion, to which they have been converted, and from their writings they obtained the name of "apologists." The Christian apologetic literature called forth in the second century, was a "vindication of Christianity by the pen, against the Jewish zealot, the Grecian philosopher, and the Roman statesman. The Christians were indeed from the first 'ready always to give an answer to every man that asked them a reason of the hope that was in them.' But when heathenism took the field against them not only with fire and sword, but with argu-

ment and slander besides, they had to add to their simple practical testimony a theoretical self-defence" (Schaff).

The earliest of these apologists¹ are Quadratus and Aristides, who wrote against the heathen, and Aristo of Pella, who wrote against the Jews, all in the reign of Hadrian (117-137). As to Quadratus, his "Apology" is lost. All we know of him is a quotation from Eusebius who says: "Quadratus addressed a discourse to Aelius Hadrian, as an apology for the religion that we profess, because certain malicious persons attempted to harass our brethren." As to Aristides of Athens, his "Apology" mentioned by Eusebius, was looked upon as hopelessly lost, but has recently been recovered. The apology contains "first, a declaration of the nature of the true God; then a scathing exposure, by way of contrast, of heathen mythological systems; and lastly, a vivid and beautiful delineation of the Christian character, with an appeal to calumniators and persecutors, drawn from the coming judgment." Some scholars think that the original was offered to the emperor Antoninus Pius (138-161).

Aristo of Pella seems to have been the earliest Christian participant in the literary conflict with Judaism. Between 135 and 175 he published a small treatise entitled "A Disputation between Jason and Papiscus concerning Christ." In this work Jason, a Jewish Christian, proved so conclusively the fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies in Jesus of Nazareth that his opponent, the Jew Papiscus, begged to be baptized. Celsus cites the work in his treatise against the Christians, written about 178.

Justin the Philosopher and Martyr.

"The most eminent among the Greek apologists of the second century is Flavius Justinus, surnamed 'Philosopher

¹ On these and the other apologists see Ehrhard, *Die altchristliche Litteratur*, vol. I, 1900, pp. 198 f.; Bardenhewer, *Patrology*, St. Louis, Mo., 1908, pp. 44 ff.; also Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. II, 1883.

and Martyr.' He is the typical apologist, who devoted his whole life to the defence of Christianity at a time when it was most assailed, and he sealed his testimony with his blood. He is also the first Christian philosopher or the first philosophic theologian. His writings were well known to Irenæus, Hippolytus, Eusebius, Epiphanius, Jerome and Photius, and the most important of them have been preserved to this day" (Schaff). He was one of those seekers after truth who found his deepest longing satisfied in the church. He tells us of his fruitless wanderings through the school of the philosophers in search of certainty and peace of mind. A stoic under whose instruction he first placed himself, asserted that the sure knowledge of God, which Justin chiefly longed for was a subordinate question of philosophical speculation. A peripatetic, of whom he next inquired, demanded, after a few days, as of primary importance, that he should settle the fee. This repelled Justin, and he went to a Pythagorean who dismissed him immediately because he had no knowledge of music, geometry and astronomy, an acquaintance with which, the Pythagorean declared, was pre-requisite to the study of philosophy, since they are the means by which the soul absorbed in earthly things may be purified. Justin then turned to a Platonist and supposed that he had reached the goal, for his teacher introduced him to the Platonic doctrine of ideas, and the pupil already dreamed that he had become a sage and was near to the vision of Deity. Then, walking alone one day on the shore of the sea, he met an old man, a mature Christian, and fell into conversation with him on divine things. The venerable man showed him that God can be perceived only by a mind sanctified by the spirit of God, and so affected him that all at once his proud dream of knowledge vanished. The old man, seeing his consternation, pointed him to the divine Word as the source of all true knowledge of God, and began to tell him of Christ.

Following these hints, Justin found in Christianity that sure knowledge of God which he had sought for in vain in the different schools of philosophers. Thus the enthusiastic Platonist became a believing Christian.²

Justin is the author of two "Apologies" against the heathen, and of a "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew." The "First Apology," which is the longer, is addressed to the emperor Antoninus Pius (137-161), and is especially valuable for the account it gives of the doctrines, ritual, and life of the early churches.³ It vindicates the Christians from the charge of atheism and immorality. "We who formerly delighted in fornication," says he, "now strive for purity. We who used magical arts, have dedicated ourselves to the good and eternal God. We who have loved the acquisition of wealth more than all else, now bring what we have into a common stock, and give to every one in need. We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not receive into our houses men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them. We pray for our enemies, we endeavor to persuade those who hate us unjustly to live conformably to the beautiful precepts of Christ to the end that they may become partakers with us of the same joyful hope of a reward from God, the Ruler of all."⁴

The "Second Apology" is chiefly an appeal against the calumnies of the cynic philosopher Crescens, and the consequent persecution to which Christians were exposed. In both apologies Justin shows how large a place was occupied in his thoughts by the "demons," as the deceivers of man-

² Justin Martyr, *Dialogues*, ch. II, 8. Archbishop Trench has reproduced the story of Justin's conversion in thoughtful poetry, in *Poems*, London, 1865, p. 140.

³ For a description of a Sunday service see ch. 65, 67.

⁴ ch. 63.

kind. The second was fatal to Justin himself, Crescens in revenge pursuing the Christian philosopher to his death.

The "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew" is a work of Platonic cast. It is here that Justin gives the well-known narrative of his own conversion. It is more than twice as large as both "Apologies," and is a vindication of Christianity from Moses and the prophets against the objections of the Jews. The disputation lasted two days. Trypho was not a fanatical Pharisee but a tolerant and courteous Jew, who evasively confessed at last that he had been much instructed, and asked Justin to come again, and to remember him as a friend.

Tatian the Assyrian.

This disciple of Justin Martyr, living from 110 to 172 A.D., was the author of an apologetic work addressed "To the Greeks" and written in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, probably in Rome. He vindicates Christianity as the "philosophy of the barbarians," and exposes the contradictions, absurdities, and immoralities of the Greek mythology from actual knowledge and with much spirit and acuteness, but with vehement contempt and bitterness. He proves that the teachings of Moses and the Old Testament comprise an older as well as a purer doctrine. All that was true, he maintains, in ancient philosophy, was derived from "barbarians" to whom God revealed Himself.

Miltiades.

Miltiades was a contemporary of Tatian and perhaps also a disciple of Justin. He defended the Christian truth against pagans, Jews and heretics, but all his writings are lost.

Apollinaris.

Claudius Apollinaris was bishop of Hieropolis in the reign of Marcus Aurelius, to whom he presented a "De-

fence of the Christian Faith," apparently in 172. But this as well as his other writings have perished.

Melito.

Melito, bishop of Sardis in Lydia, was a prolific author. He wrote an "Apology," which he presented to Marcus Aurelius. In it Melito reminds the emperor and the Romans that the appearance of Christianity in the world was contemporary with the reign of Emperor Augustus, which was so great an epoch in history. At that time, he says, the Roman Empire reached the highest point of its prosperity, and since then both have been together in the world to their mutual advantage. "The philosophy which we profess," says Melito, "first flourished indeed among the barbarians, but afterwards, when it grew up also among the nations under your government, under the glorious reign of Augustus, your ancestor, it became to your administration an auspicious blessing. For since that time the Roman power has grown in greatness and splendor, and to it you have become the desired successor; and will continue to be, together with your son, if you preserve that philosophy which has been nurtured with the empire, which commenced its existence with Augustus, and which your ancestors also did honor with other religions. One of the greatest evidences that our doctrine flourished to the advantage of a reign so happily begun, is this, that nothing disastrous has occurred to the empire, since the reign of Augustus; on the contrary, all things have proceeded splendidly and gloriously according to the wishes of all."⁵

Athenagoras.

He was "a Christian philosopher of Athens," during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. He addressed an "Apology" or "Intercession in behalf of the Christians" to the em-

⁵ Eusebius, IV, 26.

perors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. In a style of great elegance, Athenagoras meets and refutes the current accusations against the Christians, those of atheism, Thyeanean banquets (cannibalism), Oedipodean connections (incest), and effectually retorts the charge of absurdity upon the traditions of heathenism.

Minucius Felix.

Marcus Minucius Felix belongs to that class of converts who brought the rich stores of classical culture to the service of Christianity. We have from him an apology of Christianity in the form of a dialogue under the title *Octavius*. Together with his friend Octavius Januarius, who like himself had been converted from heathen error to the Christian truth, the author makes an excursion from Rome to the sea-bath at Ostia. There they meet on a promenade along the beach with Cæcilius Natalis, another friend of Minucius, but still a heathen, and, as appears from his reasoning, a philosopher of the skeptical school of the New Academy. Sitting down, the two friends begin, at the suggestion of Cæcilius, to discuss the religious question of the day. Minucius sitting between them is to act as umpire (chap. 1-4).

Cæcilius speaks first in defence of the heathen, and in opposition to the Christian religion. "He represents in his views," says Uhlhorn, "a class of persons, large then as always, who have a certain measure of culture and yet are incapable of any profound knowledge, and touch the subject of religion only on the surface. Conservative in their disposition, they adhere to the faith in which they are born, neither from choice nor from inclination, but from decorum and love of quiet. They regard it as a mark of good breeding not to dispute much upon such a topic. They are neither dreamers nor mystics. On the contrary they are somewhat skeptical, and rather inclined to ridicule religious

beliefs. Yet they are unwilling to see the old traditions disturbed, are easily inflamed against religious innovators, and are credulous of every absurdity which is reported about them.

Nothing in Christianity more excites the anger of Cæcilius than its claim to be in possession of assured truth. While he admits that we know nothing with certainty, yet he thinks "the tradition of the fathers the most venerable and the best guide to truth" (ch. 5). Wherefore the religion which they have handed down is to be followed, without dispute. The depressed condition of the Christians makes him ridicule their God. "Where is the God," asks Cæcilius, "that can help those who come to life again, while he does nothing for the living? Do not the Romans govern and reign without your God? Do they not enjoy the whole world and rule over you? The greatest and best portion of you are the prey of want and cold, are naked and hungry. Your God suffers this and seems not to know it. Either he can not, or will not, help his own: thus he is either weak or unjust" (ch. 12). Cæcilius objects to the religion of the Christians, that it has no temples, nor altars, nor images. "What absurdities," exclaims he (ch. 10), "do these Christians invent! Of the God whom they can neither show nor see they recount that he is everywhere present, that he comes and goes, that he knows and judges the actions of men, their words, and even their secret thoughts. They make him out to be a spy, a troublesome policeman, who is always in motion. How can he attend to every particular when he is occupied with the whole? Or, how can he be sufficient for the whole, when he is engaged with particulars?" (ch. 10).

In the eyes of Cæcilius the Christians appeared to be godless, to be atheists. But more than this. He repeats the lies of secret crimes, as promiscuous incest and the murder of innocent children, and quotes as authority for

these slanders the celebrated orator Fronto. "The story about the initiation of novices," Cæcilius narrates, "is as much to be detested as it is well known. An infant covered over with meal, that it may deceive the unwary, is placed before the neophytes. This infant is slain by the young pupil, with dark and secret wounds, he being urged on as if to harmless blows on the surface of the meal. Thirstily—O horror!—they lick up its blood; eagerly they divide its limbs; by this victim they are pledged together; with this consciousness of wickedness they are covenanted to mutual silence." After the feast, it is further related, when they are intoxicated, a dog that has been tied to the chandelier is provoked to jump by throwing a morsel, so that by the leap he extinguishes the light, and in the darkness thus occasioned deeds of the most abominable lust are committed and the wildest orgies are celebrated (ch. 9).

To the pagan Cæcilius, the Christians are a "reprobate, unlawful, desperate faction," who had conspired against all that is good and beautiful, a "people skulking and shunning the light, silent in public, but garrulous in corners. They despise the temples as charnel-houses, they abhor the gods, they laugh at sacred things; wretched, they pity, if they are allowed, the priests; half naked themselves, they disdain honors and purple robes. In their wondrous folly and incredible audacity they despise present torments, though they dread those which are uncertain and future; and, while they fear to die after death, they do not fear to die for the present. So does a deceitful hope, the consolation of a revival, soothe their fear" (ch. 8). Cæcilius pities the Christians for their austere habits and their aversion to the theater, banquets and other innocent enjoyments (ch. 12).

Octavius follows closely the arguments of Cæcilius, makes a drastic exposé of the follies of polytheism and refutes the usual anti-Christian calumnies, closing with a

touching portrait of the faith and life of the Christians (ch. 16-38). No arbiter's judgment is needed as Cæcilius admits his defeat.

The Epistle to Diognetus.

We have spoken of the consciousness which filled the Christians that they are the soul of the world. Among the apologists of the second century there is no one in whom this feeling was more alive, or by whom it was expressed with greater energy and beauty than the unknown author of the "Epistle to Diognetus." After depicting in sharp antitheses the peculiar enigmatical life of the Christians, contrasting in so many points with the whole of their surroundings, he sums up his description of them in the statement: "In a word, the Christians are in the world what the soul is in the body." As the passage is too beautiful to omit we give it in full: "The Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, by language, nor by civil institutions, for they neither dwell in cities by themselves, nor use a peculiar tongue, nor lead a singular mode of life. They dwell in Grecian or barbarian cities, as the case may be; they follow the ways of the country in dress, food, and the other affairs of life. Yet they present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical course of conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things as citizens; and they suffer all things as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted

by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are spoken evil of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honor; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.

“To sum up all in one word—what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world. The soul is diffused through all the members of the body and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world. The soul dwells in the body, yet is not of the body; and so the Christians dwell in the world, yet are not of the world. The soul, invisible, keeps watch in the visible body; so also the Christians are known indeed to be in the world, but their godliness remains invisible. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against it, though itself suffering no injury, because it is prevented from enjoying pleasures; the world also hates the Christians, though in nowise injured, because they abjure pleasures. The soul loves the flesh that hates it, and [loves also] the members; Christians likewise love those that hate them. The soul is imprisoned in the body, yet preserves that very body; so the Christians are confined in the world as in a prison, and yet they are the preservers of the world. The immortal soul dwells in a mortal tabernacle; so the Christians dwell as sojourners in corruptible [bodies], looking for an incorruptible dwelling in the heavens. The soul, when but ill-provided with food and drink, becomes better; in like manner, the Christians, though subjected day by day to punishment, increase the more in number. God has assigned them this illustrious

position, which it were unlawful for them to forsake" (ch. 5 and 6).⁶

Leaving aside the question of authorship which remains unanswered to this day, we will state that the Diognetus to whom this letter is addressed, was an inquiring heathen of high social position and culture, who desired information concerning the origin and nature of the religion of the Christians, and the secret of their contempt of the world, their courage in death, their brotherly love, and the reason of the late origin of this new fashion, so different from the gods of the Greeks and the superstition of the Jews. A stoic philosopher of this name instructed Marcus Aurelius. Perhaps he taught him also to despise the Christian martyrs, and to trace their heroic courage to sheer obstinacy. It is quite probable that our Diognetus was identical with the imperial tutor who expressed the desire to know what enabled these Christians "to despise the world and to make light of death."⁷

The epistle is an answer to the question of this noble heathen. "It is a brief but masterly vindication of Christian life and doctrine from actual experience. It is evidently the product of a man of genius, fine taste and classical culture. It excels in fresh enthusiasm of faith, richness of thought, and elegance of style, and is altogether one of the most beautiful memorials of Christian antiquity, unsurpassed and hardly equaled by any genuine work of the Apostolic Fathers."

Assuming with Lightfoot, Schaff and Bardenhewer the identity of the recipient of this epistle with that of the preceptor of Marcus Aurelius; assuming with Keim the year 177 as the date of composition, may we not go a step

⁶ The only codex of this epistle definitely known was the Strassburg Codex of the thirteenth century, which was destroyed in the accidental fire at Strassburg during the siege of 1870,

⁷ Comp. *Ep. and Diog.*, cap. 1, with Aurelius, *Medit.*, IX, 3 (his only allusion to Christianity).

further and assume that the work of Celsus was meant to counteract the influence which the "Epistle to Diogenetus" might produce? The very title of Celsus's work, "A True Word," is in itself suggestive. He alone claims to give a "true" discourse. "I know all. We have it all out of your own books, we need no further witnesses. You have killed yourselves with your own sword;"⁸ such is the boast of Celsus, the Platonist.

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⁸ Origen, *Against Celsus*, I, 12; II, 74.